

Members of the Appropriations Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly

Subject: Governor's Budget 2018-2019 as it impacts the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection

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I love 'my' park (Sleeping Giant) and am concerned about the proposed FY 2018-19 Governor's Budget and the impact it will have on our ability to access and preserve our precious State Parks, Forests, and Open Spaces.

Last year DEEP lost 45% of seasonal workers, exactly those workers who are essential when the Parks and Forests are most frequently visited. Connecticut's open spaces attract visitors and vacationers. If the maintenance, cleanliness, and educational opportunities of our parks is not exceptional, we risk losing our reputation as a 'destination' with concomitant loss of revenue.

A poll on the website Connecticut by the Numbers* released early in 2017, ranks Connecticut 35th among the states in well-being. Research lists the factors that increase a sense of well-being: connecting with people, being active, being curious, continuing to learn, and giving, not only of money but time. Visitor numbers show that our State Parks and Open Spaces are well used and provide the opportunity to be active. Less easy to quantify is the curiosity and learning that are fostered by being outdoors and in nature, and the opportunities for volunteerism, a clear advantage in the development of a sense of community and connectivity.

Throughout Connecticut there are communities whose residents dwell in bucolic settings. This is not true for all residents. The potential closure of more campgrounds than this past year means under-serving our urban citizens. Currently Connecticut ranks among the top three (3) states for mental health**, a standing contributed to by the quality and accessibility of our parks and open space. This value can be lost if our Parks and Open Spaces continue to be cut and neglected.

Development and construction, while necessary for economic growth in the State, can result in a concomitant hurry to build. This year's budget proposes the elimination of the Council on Environmental Quality. This loss saves a relatively small amount of money (\$174,000) while having an exponentially negative impact on the State's ability to insure compliance of regulations designed to insure protection of the environment. Continuing to cut the budget for DEEP is undermining its critical role of protecting State Parks and Forests, the waters of the State, air quality, wildlife, and generally safeguarding Connecticut's quality of life.

I thank the Committee for considering the following actions:

- 1) support a dedicated, non-lapsing account where revenues generated by DEEP can be used to hire seasonal workers, maintain State Parks, and provide critical public services
- 2) support ideas such as the Passport to the Parks which generate NEW revenues to offset the proposed cuts.

*(<http://ctbythenumbers.info/2017/02/01/ct-is-35th-in-well-being-among-the-states-slipping-lower-in-rankings/>)

**(<http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/new-mha-report-ranks-states-shows-massive-gap-mental-health-access-youth>)